

## The Funny American in Afghanistan

*Diplomatically Speaking, That Is* STATBy SARAH ELDER  
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**"SPIES Behind the Pillars, Bandits at the Pass," is Kathleen Trautman's account of life in Afghanistan.**

If Kathleen Trautman's book sells, she's going to take her first profits and buy a potato slicer for Abdul.

Mrs. Davenport would find that in bad taste, but then Katie never did care what Mrs. Davenport thought.

The book is "Spies Behind the Pillars, Bandits at the Pass," a funny, sensitive account of the Trautman family — Bob, Katie, Max and Karl — in Afghanistan.

IT WAS five years ago that the United States Information Service assigned Bob to the Middle East country, officially classified a hardship post.

Just how hard, the Trautmans didn't realize until they had succumbed to amoebic dysentery, lived in one room for six weeks and been taken in tow by the formidable Mrs. Davenport, wife of the CIA chief in Afghanistan and walking encyclopedia of do's and don'ts for diplomatic service wives.

AS FOR Abdul, he was cook-guide-friend. He specialized in Italian lasagna, guided them to distant villages for non-existent horseback tournaments and taught Max and Karl to defend themselves with slingshots. On Fridays, his day off, he moonlighted frying potato chips, slicing mountains of potatoes by hand.

That was four years ago. Max and Karl are now 13 and 12; they have a baby sister, Samantha, 2. Bob is White House correspondent for Reuters, the British news service. Katie is writing

her second book, on what it's like to turn 40 (the title, she thinks, will be "I'd Love To Go Around the World With You, But I Have To Go to the Dentist). Abdul, they hear, has gone into the potato chip business fulltime.

IN MIAMI this week to promote "Spies," Katie said she was a failure as a foreign service wife in Afghanistan — she talked too much. "I was too outspoken and too used to saying what I think."

The idea, she explained, was to court the educated Afghans for the United States. The method was an endless round of dinners and cocktail parties. The competition included both Russians and Chinese, who had a habit of baiting Americans, particularly with comments about the Vietnam war.

Standard rebuttal was a change of subject; but not for Katie.

"I feel what we have to give to the country as Americans is a picture of a system of government where people have diverse views and have the ability to speak out and say how they feel.

### *Diplomatic Standards*

"BUT IT seemed in Afghanistan the only difference between the Russians and the Americans was that the Russians served vodka at their parties and the Americans served gin!"

Inevitably the morning after, her telephone would ring (when it was working; otherwise a note came by servant), and the wife of some ranking embassy official would say, "That was in bad taste, dear."

IF THERE was something to do wrong by diplomatic standards, she did it: Make friends with the servants; decorate her sun room with Afghan rugs and furniture; learn the native language Farsi, instead of participating in the American Wives' Association coffees.